REMARKS

Claims 1-38 are currently pending in the application. Claims 1-7, 9-13, 15-17, 19-27, 29, 30, 33-36, and 38 are amended, Claims 8, 18, 28, 31, and 37 are cancelled. No new claims are added. Reconsideration and allowance of all the rejected claims are respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

REJECTION UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 1-38 are currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,594,466, to Harned et al. ("Harned") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,075,938 to Bugnion et al. ("Bugnion"), U.S. Patent No. Re. 36,462 to Chang et al. ("Chang") or U.S. Patent No. 5,621,912 to Borruso et al. ("Borruso"). Applicants traverse these rejections for at least the reasons that the combination of Harned and any of the applied secondary references fails to disclose, teach, or suggest all of the claim elements.

Claim 1 recites, among other things, the claim features of evaluating a user's information technology (IT) skills including (1) associating an IT exercise with one or more of a plurality of virtual machines; (2) pre-configuring each of the one or more of the plurality of virtual machines with at least a set of virtual machine files associated with the IT exercise, wherein the set of virtual machine files determines a virtual machine state; (3) launching the one or more of the plurality of virtual machines associated with the IT exercise in the virtual machine state using the set of virtual machine files; (4) displaying to the user, information that is associated with the IT exercise, wherein the information describes tasks that the user is instructed to complete; and (5) performing the tasks on the set of virtual machine files of the one or more of the plurality of virtual machines, wherein the performed tasks place the one or more of the plurality of virtual machines into a new state, and wherein the plurality of virtual machines are configured to run an operating system. Claims 6, 12, 17, 21, and 26 recite similar features.

Harned fails to disclose an association between an IT exercise and one or more of a plurality of virtual machines that are pre-configured with at least a set of virtual machine files associated with the IT exercise. Rather, Harned discloses a single generic
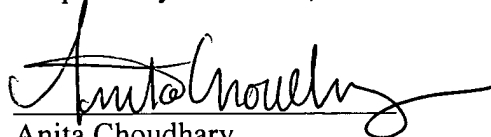
virtual machine on a target system used for tutorial services in a graphics system (see Harned at col. 3 lines 57-66). Harned does not disclose a plurality of virtual machines or IT exercises pre-configured with one or more virtual machines. The generic virtual machine of Harned is not pre-configured to be associated with an IT exercise or associated with a set of virtual files used to determine a virtual machine state. Harned also does not disclose a set of virtual machine files that determine the state of the virtual machine much less the tasks performed to place the virtual machine in'to a new state. As such, Harned fails to suggest the claimed features of at least claims 1, 6, 12, 17, 21, and 26. Additionally, none of the applied secondary references remedy the deficiencies of Harned, as described above.

Dependent claims 2-5, 9, 9-11, 13-16, 19, 20, 22-25, 27, 29, 30, 32-36, and 38 depend from and add features to independent claims 1, 6, 12, 17, 21, and 26. As such, these claims are allowable at least by virtue of their dependency and the additional features they provide. If the Examiner insists on maintaining the rejections of these claims, the Examiner is requested to provide citations to specific portions of the references that address the features of these dependent claims.

For the foregoing reasons, reconsideration and allowance of all the claims pending in the application are requested. If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number provided.

Dated: January 13, 2005   Respectfully submitted,

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